

Firefighting is family affair for chief

Harriman promoted to Duxbury chief

By Grey Perry
MPG Newspapers

DUXBURY — Amid old fire helmets, boots, model fire trucks, photos, credentials and firefighting paraphernalia, Duxbury Fire Chief Bill Harriman is savoring his new position. He's completely at home.

In fact, the fire house is his home as much as anyone's place of work can be, since he spends part of every day of the year there. It's been that way for years. His father was a call firefighter in Carver and so was his uncle. His brother, Dana, is fire chief in Carver. It was exciting for the boys to see their father go off to respond to an alarm and talk about it after he returned home. Both sons became professional firefighters and department chiefs.

Harriman began as a call firefighter in Carver in 1960. He served four years in the U.S. Army from 1967-1970 and was stationed in Fairbanks, Alaska, and Fort Rucker in Alabama. Both bases happened to also have airfields, and so Harriman gained cross training in structural firefighting as well as air craft crash and rescue work. In July 1971 he began as a firefighter in Duxbury and was promoted to lieutenant in 1974. He was named deputy chief in 1983 and has been acting chief before and after the two year tenure of former Chief Kenneth Erickson, who left Duxbury last July.

Harriman has done it all.

Through the years, Harriman's

schedule has allowed for some extended periods of off duty time. "Firefighters work different hours than most people, with long shifts at the station and subsequent time off, often during the week. Many firefighters have been athletic all their lives, and many have become good golfers. I enjoy golf myself. I get out once or twice a week whenever I can. It's a great outlet for me," he said.

He has other outside interests, too. "My brother and I have taken over a small cranberry bog in Carver that our dad operated for many years before he retired. We help with the harvest, but have to contract out much of the fertilizing and spraying. It's a great change of pace for both of us."

Changing role

Still, his heart is at the fire station. He works closely with the 18 full-time firefighters there, as well as the 10 call firefighters who respond as needed, but are employed elsewhere. Harriman notes a changing responsibility for these firefighters and for his department as well. While the fire department is called upon approximately 1,500 times each year, the amount of actual firefighting they do has diminished in recent years.

"Firefighting has changed," he said. "Building codes now require more fireproof materials, people are installing smoke detectors and alarm systems, even residential sprinkler systems. By increasing public awareness of fire safety, we have begun to work our way out of our traditional role."

The department has more of a



Staff photo/Grey Perry

Top bill — Bill Harriman is comfortable in his new role as Duxbury fire chief.

what Harriman calls a "customer service" function now. He wants his department to be able to provide more education about fire safety and to do more inspections of businesses and homes. "We have the expertise to make recommendations to those with questions on fire safety, smoke detectors, or home alarm systems," he said.

In addition, he wants his department to be able to provide crisis assistance to those not directly involved in an incident, but strongly affected by it. For example, the close relative or others nearby who may be affected by an incident to which the fire department has responded — on the scene help, consolation or assurance. "Our training includes this sort of thing, and we want to help in any way we can," he says.

Harriman still responds to calls. He feels it is important to be at the scene to offer his professional

help and do some customer service too. "Even the accidental alarms have some positives. For one thing, they test the entire system. And sometimes it gives us an opportunity to do some on the spot fire safety training and a chance to explain what we are all about."

He is proud of his staff and of the depth of specialties they have. While every firefighter must be able to do all jobs, some have outside specialties such as building contractors, electricians, tree arborists which give them unique abilities which can be put to best use during emergencies. "It amounts to putting the best person in the right spot, and we have a lot of talent in the department," he said.

Harriman will be meeting soon with town manager Rocco Longo to discuss candidates for the positions of deputy and lieutenant created by his promotion.

Bill Harriman Memorial Library, #1766